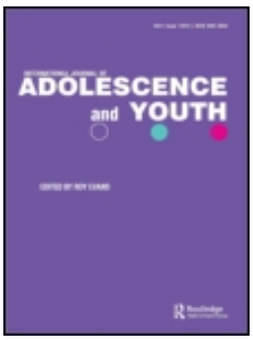

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'The only time I feel girly is when I go out': Drinking stories, Teenage girls , and respectable femininities

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ABSTRACT

Over the past decade or so, there has been a growing concern in public and policy discourse that contemporary British young women are drinking in ever-greater quantities at an ever-younger age. This paper is based on a small-scale doctoral research into young women's smoking and drinking practice in a town in Southern England, and explores how teenage girls perform, negotiate and scrutinize legitimate generational drinking femininities. The article, using a feminist poststructuralist analysis, particularly focuses on the use of teenage girls' cultural and material practices, especially the use of stories and snapshots in enabling girls to navigate and negotiate shifting gendered alcohol discourses.

Over the past decade or so there has been a growing concern in UK public policy that the populace is drinking excessive amounts of alcohol at an ever-younger age (Plant and Plant, 2006). This concern has focused particularly on underage[1] drinking and the alcohol practices of the young, with policy documents such as *Youth Alcohol Action Plan* (2008), acknowledging the need to tackle excessive drinking cultures amongst young people. The growing scholarly literature in the field has identified alcohol use and intoxication as being an important part of how to *'have fun'* within young people's social lives. (Szmigin *et al.*, 2007; Warwick *et al.*, 2009; Cullen, 2010a). Central to this concern that contemporary British society has hit the bottle, is a media discourse of the drunken fallen woman, with regular features in newspapers and magazines of inebriated girls sprawled outside nightclubs. These articles are also paralleled by regular exposes in celebrity magazines and UK tabloid newspapers pillorying

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excessive, out-of-control young female celebrities such as *Girls Aloud* singer, Sarah Harding, actor, Lindsay Lohan and singer, Amy Winehouse, as examples of a new kind of excessive women.

This article is concerned with exploring some of the ways that teenage girls in a town in Southern England perform, negotiate and scrutinize ways of doing legitimate, drinking femininities. My interest here emerges from contemporary moral panics that young women in particular are drinking more often and in ever-greater quantities than before. Within the discursive spaces of the media, these drinking girls emerge as 'ladettes' (Jackson, 2006; Tinkler and Jackson, 2007), living for the weekend, appropriating the worst excesses of 'masculinity' through intoxication in city centre bars and clubs. Of course, earlier work by scholars such as Penny Tinkler, has illustrated how for the 'liberated' new women of the 1920s, drinking and smoking was also similarly framed as excessive and masculinised within popular discourses of the time (Tinker, 2006).

This article will focus especially on the use of cultural and material practices around young women's drinking, in particular the use of stories and snapshots in the fieldwork context, which allowed young women to produce performances of valorized drinking femininities and of *'calculated hedonistic'* femininity (Szmigin *et al.*, 2008). In order to do this I will draw on my doctoral work with young women aged 13–19 and their alcohol and tobacco use. I am interested here in the normative meanings generated about both young women's alcohol use and the production of their gendered and generational drinking identities. Recent work on the use of drinking stories within friendship groups highlights the central role of social pleasure, of fun, and the social construction of meaning around cultural and material practices relating to alcohol consumption (Workman, 2001; Szmigin *et al.*, 2007).

The discursive framings around alcohol use thus provides insights into the formation of meaning and normative sex-gender hierarchies around excessive alcohol use. My interest here is not so much focused on young women drinking alcohol as a way of 'doing' boy, but rather how the young women describe 'girly' drinking, and what talking about and using alcohol does for young women in negotiating new kinds of femininities. I am particularly interested in how these ways of 'doing' girl uphold rather than necessarily counter heteronormative versions of sex-gender. By heteronormative I mean a kind of institutionalised normative heterosexuality. As Ingrahams (1994) states:

> Heteronormativity – the view that institutionalized heterosexuality constitutes the standard for legitimate and prescriptive sociosexual arrangements.
>
> (Ingrahams, 1994, p. 204)

Such normative versions of sex-gender are thus predicated on that of sexuality and permeate cultural and material practices. As such, particular ways of doing legitimate and legible versions of 'boy' or 'girl' are deeply entwined with normative practices of heterosexuality, especially in relation to drinking the correctly amount, in the 'right' places, with the 'right' people, which could enable one to lay claim to a valorized, and deeply gendered (hetero)sexualised 'cool'. Of course, I acknowledge that it can prove interesting to try and track resistant gendered practices, particularly when working in the field of youth studies. However, I want to suggest that whilst boozing in parks might be seen to be generationally resistant, within the context of the teenage girls' friendship cultures presented here, moderated excessive drinking was framed as normative, 'girly' and worthy of celebration.

However, as I will go on to discuss later, a generational element in the ways alcohol was used was key and that whilst in the present, controlled excess was legitimate, girls framed their future drinking selves within a discourse of sobriety, as future 'grown up' and 'sober' mothers the normative 'emphasized femininity' (Connell, 1987) of adulthood returns. Indeed it was the very transitory, temporal and spatial dimensions of such outdoor drinking by teen girls that was notable in both the stories from the present-day, and their imagined transitions into legitimate, indoor commercial drinking venues and their expressed desire for a future 'controlled' sobriety.

BACKGROUND

This research took place between October 2003 and March 2005 in an affluent borough on the edge of a large city in England. Although the area is relatively prosperous, the young women involved in this study came from a wide range of social, cultural and economic backgrounds. The two settings included a generic youth centre and youth provision in a large further education college. The young women who used the youth centre hailed from the immediate vicinity, and were predominantly White British aged between 14 and 18. The college students were older

aged 16–19, and were ethnically mixed, as the catchment area for the local college was extensive, with students often commuting large distances across the city.

This multi-method, qualitative research involved participant observation, group and individual interviews, bulletin board postings and interactive visual participatory methods. In all, 36 young women were interviewed either individually or in informal groups. This article draws on selected findings from interviews, participant observation and internet board postings from these settings.

My interest in the young people's use of photography emerged out of the existing material practices of the friendship of the groups in both settings. Mobile phone technology was used occasionally by the girls who had camera phones. Indeed, one young woman's short clip of a friend drunkenly dancing proved highly popular. At the time of the fieldwork, girls were predominately using still photography, and either uploading images to photo sharing websites such as *Photobucket*, or printing copies, distributing to friends, and displaying them on bedroom walls and in journals. Following existing visual practices in the field settings I used interactive photography methods by distributing disposable cameras and girls taking pictures in weekend and evening social situations. Young women kept a copy of the resulting pictures, and the images were used as interview prompts. Participant observation at the field sites also enabled 'naturally' occurring talk to be collected around the girls' photographic practices. To ensure anonymity, all names in this chapter have been altered and where possible, substituted by young people's own choice of pseudonym.

STORYTELLING AND DRUNKEN PERFORMANCES

Previous work on young people's drinking stories has acknowledged the multifaceted role of storytelling practices and drunken performances. Stories, as the anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1976) argues are spaces where *'webs of meaning'* may be constructed in an ongoing interplay between teller and audience around the cultural meanings of alcohol use (Workman, 2001). Within storytelling practices both the narrator and the listener have a key role to play, in the flow of information, the to and fro of questions, asides and interconnecting stories. These produce a complex collaborative shared narrative as stories are told, heard, reframed and acknowledged. Such storytelling performances

around alcohol use provide a further veil of performance beyond that of the initial drinking display. As such earlier events could be reconfigured and remade in each new telling for humorous and/or other entertaining intent.

Workman's (2001) North American study of college fraternity members' alcohol use traced a thematic range of stories that were clearly observable in my UK context. For Workman these were:

- *Drunkenness as risk-taking* which focuses on drunken performance as entertainment;
- *Drunkenness as physical exploration,* which were stores about physicality;
- *Drunkenness as contextual behaviour,* which framed the alcohol use as an integral part of confirming their university experience.

Workman (2001) using Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1977) explores such ritualised storytelling practices as a kind of game, which enables individuals to provide *'a set of implied, unquestioned rules'* (Workman, 2001; p. 430). Such drinking stories thus produce a range of ritualised, normalised rules governing established drinking practices. Moving beyond this, I wish to draw on British work on the interplay of social class and gender in women's negotiation of normative discourses of respectability. For example, in her study of female care students, Bev Skeggs (2001) similarly draws on Bourdieu's concept of capitals to explore the value contained in the female participants' symbolic practices. Such highly valued concepts as 'glamour' and 'respectability' were drawn on by the working class women in Skegg's study to claim a gendered power through reputation. As I will go on to argue later in the article, such twin themes of *reputation* and *respectability* as embodied and symbolic practices were also crucial in the young women's stories in this study, particularly when attempting to eschew the excess of disrespectable, drunken girl.

The highly gendered nature of alcohol practices is thus evident in the ways women in earlier studies describes their alcohol use. Killingsworth's (2006) more recent work with middle class mother's drinking stories found a more guarded use of the drinking story that involved women sharing tales of their lives pre-motherhood. Whilst in earlier times female alcohol use was highly stigmatised (Hey, 1986), the concerns around respectability and motherhood still position drinking mothers as highly problematic. As such, the women in Killingsworth's ethnography carefully framed their earlier and ongoing alcohol

use as a canvas to portray autonomy and independence, whist still taking great care to uphold the respectable, abstaining norms around alcohol use, pregnancy and motherhood.

The use of such drinking stories by women to produce an active femininity was also evident in Blackman's (2004) UK-based work with teenage subcultural New Wave Girls, who shared party stories with friends in order to perform a punky 'alternative' identity to unite their friendship group with their 'anti-patriarchal practices', independence and their projection of inspirational identities (Blackman, 2004). The young women in my study also told similarly entertaining stories and included tales of extreme physicality framed within the need for hedonistic thrills to be part of their contextual lived teen experience. Such narrative framings were also echoed in the young women's stories as a crucial role, however with a key difference. Following the highly gendered nature of alcohol use (Hey, 1986; Ettore, 1997; Cullen, 2010a), such stories followed a familiar pattern. These included young women using tales of extreme physicality to dismiss other girls' behaviour. This dismissal of other women's bawdy excess differed substantially from the macho alcohol-fuelled tales of Workman's (2001) US frat-boys. Nor did girls always use stories to produce 'alternative' or 'resistant' identities, but rather to negotiate and reproduce shared discourses of a fluid, teenage feminine respectability and youthful rebellion simultaneously.

DRINKING AND GETTING DRUNK

One of the key ways in to an exploration of teenage girls' alcohol use is through the kinds of storytelling practices and narratives that emerge around what, for the majority of the participants because of their age, was an illicit activity. The use of girls' talk has been acknowledged in various research as a central part of girls' friendship work (Hey, 1997; Holland *et al.*, 1998; George, 2007; Paechter and Clark, 2010). In McRobbie's earlier research on youth clubs it appears that the girls' investment in their talk is a key part of these young women being deemed as non-active youth club users (McRobbie and Garber, 1976). Yet this very 'talk' is the action space of how girls produce and create these discursive selves and, as Holland *et al.* (1998) argue, such talk may be framed within male sexual discourse around an active male sexuality. Such 'talk' featured as a key part of young women's drinking practices, and might take place via mobile phone or internet talk boards, could include both the intricate

planning of a night out (*What to wear? Where to go? Who was invited? What alcohol to bring? Where to get the alcohol*) and the celebratory aftermath (*Who drank what? How everyone behaved? How it felt to be that drunk? Who kissed who? Who argued? Who ended the night a drunken mess?*).

In this section I want to move to draw on data extracts from the field that highlight the tensions between sassy, in-control, party girls 'vs.' excessive out-of-control girls. It is not that I want to suggest that these two subject positions were mutually exclusive. Indeed, girls may narrate their early drinking days as 'out of control' puker (Demant, 2009), before graduating to a more measured and moderated intake. Whilst this move may be framed within a claim for personal autonomy and agency over a situation, these may be reframed by peers to demonstrate other younger women's immaturity and recklessness.

Underage alcohol use was prevalent in the town and young women described drinking at nights and weekends at commercial and non-commercial settings including outdoor locations such as parks, (described by young people as *cotches),* at home, at parties and in pubs and nightclubs. Alcohol was acquired via older friends and family or by purchasing it illegally by 'passing' for 18 or by using 'fake ID' at various lenient retail venues. Indeed girls' stories were used to share the practices on how one might acquire fake ID with younger peers. Young people reported that they drank a range of alcohol products, although in this study cheap alcopops and *Lambrini,* described by several young people as 'tramp' or 'bitch piss', were perceived as the favoured tipples of less sophisticated, pre-teen and early teen female drinkers. The favoured self-reported choices of many of the young women were red wine, lager, and especially vodka. Young people in both fieldwork settings reported drinking and 'getting drunk' as a central part of a good night out.

> Carla [15 years old white female] began to describe the various forms of alcohol. She told me she had been drunk on Red Square as bitch piss, but that other drink is like Lambrini were called 'tramps piss' I asked Ali [15 year old white male], and Carla whether boys could drink alcopops or lambrini. They said only if he wanted people 'to think he was gay', but then again generally young people 'drink anything we can get our hands on really!'
>
> (Youth Centre fieldnotes, December 2003)

In this extract, *Lambrini* and *Red Square* (a ready mixed caffeine and vodka based drink) emerge as powerful signifiers of gender, generation and social class. Ali's and Carla's descriptions illustrate the intersections of social class and gender in categorising various

form of alcohol. Drinking was a highly gendered practice and the 'alcopops' and Lambrini' were seen as subordinated, feminine forms of alcohol which could be viewed as destabilising young men's heteronormative gender through their consumption (*'if he wanted people to think he was gay'*).

'Tramps' piss' also has a dual meaning. A *tramp* within British English usually refers to a vagrant, in addition to the modern American English connotation the famous song The Lady is a Tramp as a loose woman. *Lambrini* as a brand is thus linked to both 'cheapness' in relation to its relative low cost and its imagined consumption by particular kinds of (low-class) women. Such explicit linking of gender, sexuality, social class and identity to particular alcoholic beverages were evident within the ways in which young people spoke about the consumption of alcohol. The caveat that one would drink anything 'we *can get our hand on*' illustrates that even the gendering and hierarchical nature of these drinks could be undercut by the need to gain access to alcohol as a valued commodity and purveyor of a class-based and sexualised 'cool'. This was regardless of the intricacies of the wider symbolic status and gendered nature of a particular brand or type of drink.

Beyond the type of alcohol consumed came the need to perform and position stories about these drunken performances after the 'good night out'. For example, I had only been in my fieldwork setting at the college for a few days when early one morning I waited in the drizzle with a small group of students for the common room to be unlocked. The young people had just returned from their Easter vacation, and bounded up to one another for welcoming hugs.

'How was your Easter?' enquired one 17 year old student, Lara, hugging a male friend. He laughed, and seemingly wanted to impress Lara with his daring exclaimed: *'Great!! I got so wasted. I can't even remember. I was drunk all the time*!'

Several of the male and female students around him laughed, and agreed that they too had spent the whole previous two weeks out-of-their-minds on alcohol, and reminisced about several shared 'good nights out' and various drunken escapades. This everyday exchange highlighted the need for a kind of hyperbolic description of alcohol use, and I began to see regular patterns in terms of banter around the celebratory drinking antics within the peer group as a socially cohesive factor.

However, because of the age restrictions on the purchase of alcohol or unaccompanied entry into licensed establishments

such as nightclubs or bars, many drinking stories were based on adventures in outdoor, hidden locations such as parks, graveyards and the riverbank, where alcohol, sexual adventure and hiding from the police became key elements within such stories. The illicit nature of underage drinking in outdoor, hidden locations meant that pre-planning a night out took much thought. For example, the extract below comes from one of the talk boards run by young people:

> ... where are we gonna go, i seem to remember there being two graveyards, but i can't for the life of me remember where one of them is... too much alcohol!
>
> ... it will have to either be in the Graveyard/kiddies playground round the back of Woolworths ... Or the bigger graveyard next to the shell petrol station. Friday would probs be best ... but the sole issue is, the feds[2] used to come to the kiddies graveyard, so the other one is a safer bet ...
>
> (Exchange on unofficial college bulletin board, October 2004)

In this extract the two students are organising a post-college drinking session, but due to age constraints they negotiate the advantages of various non-commercial drinking locations within the locality. The *kiddie's playgrounds* and the *graveyards* as drinking sites all had stories attached to them about previous adventures and the kinds of activities that went on there. These 'wild spaces' of the graveyard become an older playground for these teenagers to 'play' and, hence, drinking stories were not just attached to individuals but also to places as certain locations began to acquire reputations for safety and danger, of sexual adventure and intoxicated thrills. As Maria, discussing photos of the graveyard, states:

> Maria: It is a bit but it's kinda like our home. You know we've been there so many times it used to be standard Friday evening lets go to the playground in the graveyard. Everyone would meet there.
> Fin: What do people do when they are there?
> Maria: Drink! Drink so much that you can't see and have to be dragged onto a bus. Make out. People would have sex behind tombstones and stuff.
> Fin: Have sex behind tombstones?
> Maria: Uh huh. You know the big ones?
> Fin: Yeh.
> Maria: There a string of them. There's like four and then there is like one, surrounded by trees, and if you flatten it out underneath it is quite dry, and you can put your coat down there.
>
> (Interview with Maria, White British female, 17 college)

Young women described personal alcohol consumption as a quest to become deliberately intoxicated. However, the main intentions of alcohol consumption were those of sociality, enhanced physicality, and to reduce social inhibitions and create a pleasurable 'buzz'. Young people had a range of words to describe levels of inebriation, and the kinds of physical and sexual adventure that may be available.

> The young people gave me a list of words to describe a range of drunkenness. This ranged from:
> Paralytic – 'you can't move and you have to be thrown into a cab.'
> To the lower ranked 'off your tits'; 'wankered' and 'rat arsed' ... they added that so many drinking words were sexual 'cos you have stupid sex when your drunk'.
>
> (Fieldnotes – June 2004, College common room)

Indeed very few young women positioned themselves as abstainers. It is striking when reading contemporary alcohol guidance, that until recently it appeared that notions of alcohol use within policy and practice framed underage drinking as an individualised rather than highly social activity. However, within current policy there is an increasing recognition of the role of family and friends and the socially cohesive role that drinking practices may play. It is within this framing that I became interested in drinking as this socially cohesive practice and the role it had in enabling young women in these social contexts to perform and produce a particularly kinds of valorised, 'cool' femininities through their alcohol use.

Such drinking practices did not only include the actual consumption and experience of drunkenness, but the very planning and recounting of the night's activities. Such nights could be revisited perpetually via storytelling and the snaps caught on mobile phones and cameras. The 'narratives of identity' (Valentine, 2000) acknowledge the liminal and in-between status of youth as age and social category (Sibley, 1995). The drinking performances and stories help young women cement a future womanhood by utilising 'adult' signifiers of drink, illicit sexual activity and heightened physicality. By using such experiences, girls reassembled their present youthful status and the memory work of visual and oral storytelling practices remained central as processes of archiving and collating individual and shared friendship group histories.

GIRLS ARE TOO BITCHY OR TOO GIGGLY: OTHER DRUNKEN GIRLS

Whilst the boys in the college common room often told tall-tales of alcohol, drug fuelled and sexual adventure, girls in both the youth centre and college common room settings, had to take great care in the ways that they might share stories in order for such tales not to be used against them. This did not mean that excessive girl stories were not told but, rather, that that one's position in the friendship hierarchy was crucial in whether young woman could tell tales about their own or others behaviours. Older girls within the youth club sometimes took on the mantle of 'honorary boy' when trying to negotiate such friendships and local discourses that placed an acceptability on an active male sexuality as illustrated below:

> Charlotte was in a really talkative mood today. In conversation with a group of girls and boys, she insisted that 'I am really alcohol tolerant. I really drink like a boy.'
>
> With a swagger, Charlotte seemed to being somewhat macho. In the past she tells tales of fighting, drinking lots of lager whereas 'girls drink bitchpiss like alcopops'.
>
> 'Alcopops don't get you pissed they just get you hyper'. She continued to equate her love of beer, fighting and her preference for male company:
>
> 'I have no real good girlfriends. Girls are too bitchy and too giggly. I even rate girls like a boy. I'll go like 'she's shaggable'. The only time I feel girly is when I go out.'
>
> (Fieldnotes, April, 2004, Youth Centre)

By positioning herself in the hierarchy of the peer group, Charlotte identifies key features that distinguish her from other girls. These are her friendship groups, her toughness, her refusal to drink subordinated forms of alcohol such as alcopops (*bitch-piss*), her greater 'alcohol tolerance', and via her eschewal of largely feminised and low-status drinks, her capacity for higher consumption of esteemed forms of alcohol. This engagement with a contextual appropriation of 'masculine' cultural forms means that beyond her drinking practices (*drinking like a boy*), Charlotte states that she also actively rates other girls' sexual attractiveness in the male heterosexual banter as key parts of performing a dominant role within (girls') friendship hierarchies. Charlotte's articulation of the need to be physically and mentally 'tolerant' to alcohol and to be able to take one's beer without becoming a

(feminised) drunken wreck is a key part of her gendered drinking identity, one that she believes crucially distinguishes her from the other bitchy and giggly (and perhaps drunken) girls.

Charlotte is, thus, attempting to appropriate an 'active' drinking masculinity, but this 'honorary boy' status had its limits. Charlotte still needed to position herself as heterosexually desirable, despite the fact that rating other girls as 'shaggable' might be seen to destabilise her heterosexual femininity. Despite subordinating 'feminine' forms of alcohol, and the behaviour of 'other' girls, Charlotte still wanted to *'find a fella'* (McRobbie, 1978; p. 106). Her 'active' drinking antics do not move Charlotte substantially beyond the confines of what Holland *et al.* (1998) deems *'the male in the head'*, where young women reframe their actions and desires within a male heterosexual matrix. Indeed, the 'glamming up' to feel 'girly' on girls nights out and to drink cocktails and wine with the girls highlights alcohol deployment as part of gendered, contextual practices. Charlotte's negotiation of gendered drinking friendship spaces was enabled via her veteran status at the youth club. At the age of 19, Charlotte was considerably older than other younger female club users and was close to key male youth centre users. Other girls (those who were *too bitchy or giggly* in Charlotte's description) thus had considerably less space to navigate and negotiate the appropriate bounds of alcohol use, teen drinking cultures and heteronormative femininities.

However, other girls at the youth centre sometimes also tried to use drinking stories to claim agency and self-autonomy. Such autonomy was used to demonstrate a generational independence from family authority and youthful rebellion, yet for other girls such stories may have radically differing results. For example, one afternoon at the youth centre a 14 year-old young woman, Andi, recounted her previous night's adventure at an established cotch at the river bank where she had drunkenly sat next to an older "Chinese man" on the river bench. She told the assembled girls how she had been offered and accepted a bottle of cider from the older man's crate. It was the transgressive nature of talking to an adult male stranger, and participating in an illicit activity, that was this young woman's attempt to appear as a daring risk-taker who could interact with older, ethnically 'other' men and still live to tell the tale. The others girls, including the older Charlotte, listened to Andi's story and then promptly castigated their friend for her 'risky' adventures and for taking alcohol off a stranger in case he had put drugs in the drink.

Instead of being admired for her daring adventure, Andi is recast as a potential victim of drink spiking and drug rape. This younger girl lacked the social status within the hierarchy of the older Charlotte and thus faced castigation rather than celebration of her 'risky' antics. As a lower status girl, Andi is thus deemed to be responsible for her irresponsible behaviour that gained attention from sexually predatory older men. Her drinking story is thus cast as a confessional in which the audience sit in judgement.

Andi's audience retained the power to reframe the story and cast the protagonist as victim or villain. Such information might be used at later times against the storyteller in casting her as the 'othered' excessive girl. As such these friendship groups' power play was fluid, contextual and relational, and the social codes governing what might be shared depending on the particular positioning of the storyteller and her audience. Indeed rather than inevitably bringing girls together stories could also be used to mount new battle lines, and regulate and restrict ways in which girls might legitimately use their leisure time. In such cases the Foucaultian notion of pastoral power (Foucault, 1982) is useful in thinking the careful interplay between teller and audience members and how this might reframe a girl's adventure. For Foucault, pastoral power has ecclesiastical roots via the confessional. This is where the priest may tend to his flock through their need to confess in order to achieve forgiveness and salvation. Secular forms, such as Andi's drinking story as confessional, enable the eager audience who, through listening, can wield power through their knowledge of the teller's deeds.

The listener in these drinking stories thus shapes the emerging story, its discursive framings and the production of a self that might be 'tellable' and legitimate within a given context. Indeed amongst girls' friendship groups, stories about Othered excessive girls cropped up regularly. These stories were always shared in the absence of the protagonist. These Othered girls drank too much, couldn't take their drink, were sexually reckless, sought attention, and behaved in shameful ways with little regard for their reputation. Such stories were told in the absence of the other and were thus used as a technique of control and surveillance in negotiating the pecking order and recognisable 'cool' of particular friendship circles. The panoptical gaze (Foucault, 1975) evident in this subtle regulating of girls' behaviour, and the almost impossible positioning of young women as drinkers, hedonists *and* party girls meant that even when knowingly trying to produce an *'up for it'* image, one might accidently overstep

the normative framing and became reviled as a figure of pity, or revulsion: 'the slag' (Lees, 1993; Ringrose, 2008).

Such generational and class specific heteronormative femininities thus become important settings in which to frame experience and filter out recognitions of pleasure and autonomy. The bawdy tales of puking and peeing in their frat-house parties in Workman's (2001) study are not open to young women in the same way, as this subject position remains an impossibility as legible and legitimate for many teenage girls. Such a movement of cultural and symbolic capital of drinking, drunkenness and the role of the male raconteur are simply not open to young women, as the moral judgements of respectable femininities and reputation in *being, becoming* and *maintaining* 'girlyness' continued to frame how young women positioned their own and others identities and social actions (Skeggs, 2001).

Other girls' stories were framed around the roles they took within friendship groups. These stories were not necessarily about personal excessive drinking but the need to show that one was a 'good friend' by taking care of others in their group. 14-year-old Amy's snapshots involved an early evening barbecue on the green, with one other female friend and a group of boys. Amy leafed through the photographs and recounted that during the evening Amy and her friend, Sian, took the role of 'cook', 'for three hours' when preparing the barbecue sausages. Later, after the drinking, Amy became 'carer' for her drunken male friend.

> I left at ten after someone getting really drunk and me having to look after them, and then getting fed up half way through and deciding I wasn't going to do that anymore.
>
> (Amy, White British female, 14, youth centre)

Amy's frustration with these traditional feminised roles led her to leave early and return to the domesticated space of the family home. In the later discussion, Amy and Sian voiced disgust about how the boys would attempt to 'piss' in their drinks should they leave a can of lager unattended on the picnic bench. The easy physicality around puking and pissing evident in the frat house boys of Workman's study (Workman, 2001) are present here, but not with the girls revelling in this physicality but as the 'joke' victim. The attending girls have the role of cook, carer and 'fall guy' for the particularly bawdy physicality and leaky bodies of their male friends. The notion that Amy or Sian might publically urinate in the boys' drinks is unthinkable

here, as the kinds of exuberant physicality in the boys' high jinks are clearly demarked as impossible for 'respectable', drunken girl performances. Amy voices exasperation with the gendered dimensions of girls'friendships and social interactions with boys, which still place Amy as cook, carer and/or sexual possibility.

Such future possibilities were too over laden by the guise of 'respectable', heteronormative femininities. Girls described tales of their disgraceful younger selves binging on vodka only to be replaced by their current 'sensible' drinking selves. Their imagined articulated future included girls proclaiming a resolute refusal to get old, by dying tragically and young (*a fantasy rock 'n' roll death*), or, more often, girls spoke of a transition into adult sobriety and future responsibility. For example, in the following two extracts, both 14-year-old Betty and 16-year-old Sade reminisce on their younger drinking activities.

> Betty: I was really, really drunk and I was walking over the bridge to meet my friend and I started feeling really, really ill and I started puking so I sat down to wait for her. Then I lay down and then I started being sick everywhere and I was kinda paralytic and I had to be taken home by the police, which wasn't so good ...
>
> We bought 30 cans of Fosters. It was Fosters because I can drink it easily.
>
> Fin: Do you drink this now?
>
> Betty. No I hate it. I drink Guinness[3] if someone offers me a pint. It's creamy. I can control my drinking normally now. If I go out for a night and I want to get tipsy, I'll drink shots and it's a lot cheaper and you don't have to drink so much.
>
> (Betty, 14, White British, youth centre)

> Sade: I was straightedge[4] until I was 15 and then I started drinking and then I thought 'no it's really gay'[5] and so I stopped. I drink now but I don't get drunk ...
>
> (Sade, 16, Black African, college)

Sade and Betty narrate an ordered drinking trajectory from *non-drinking ignorant child* to *novice puker* to *veteran controlled drinker*. Betty, at 14 reflects back on her disgraceful younger drunken self, and wished to position her present self within a framing of autonomy and self-control *'to drink normally'*. Issues she identifies such as self-control, normality and finance have moved her drinking from lager in the park to shots in city centre bars. Sade, too described an accelerated transition from non-drinking straightedge youth to sobriety all by the age of 16.

The 'ideal' girl in these situations was not the abstainer, nor was she the drunken mess. The careful negotiated role was about producing a sassy party girl who was neither too prim nor too

slutty. In common with many other feminist writers on young women's friendship (Hey, 1997, George, 2007 Ringrose, 2008; Ringrose, 2010), the figure of the 'excessive woman', the sexually voracious and out of control woman was used as narrative trope in order to communicate the kinds of appropriate heteronormative femininities that were open for the girls to perform. Drinking to get tipsy, but not too drunk, is the *'calculated hedonism'* (Szmigin *et al.*, 2008) in becoming an in-control 'respectable' drinker. By such moves the symbolic capital of the carefully chosen 'girly' alcohol can convey autonomy and sophistication, *and* heterosexual desirability, but girls must continue to take care that they do not become a drunken mess who needs to be dragged home by friends, or abandoned in the emergency room at the local hospital (Measham, 2006). Young women's complex navigation of themes of insobriety *and* caution within their drinking tales, reflects tensions highlighted in Killingworth's earlier work where older women carefully constructed narratives which whilst celebrating hedonistic, youthful pasts, sought to portray a present sober, 'respectable' motherhood (Killingworth, 2006).

CONCLUSION

This article has attempted to tease out some of the ways that girls' stories about alcohol use and drunken performances were highly gendered and linked to generation. It provides insights into the nuanced ways friendship groups were positioned around active masculinities. This does not mean that girls did not have the power to act; indeed many of the young women were keen to stress a personal autonomy and agency but, rather, that the wider structures of normative heterosexual femininity and desire create legitimate ways for girls to drink alcohol socially. It has been my intention in this short article to unpack and explore the intersections and interactions of social class, gender, generation and locale in order to untangle the contextual and situated dynamics of women's alcohol use across the life course. As I have argued elsewhere in a discussion of young women's cigarette use (Cullen, 2010b), notions of gendered, generational and class-based branded 'cool' impact on the kinds of drinking cultures upheld and the legitimacy of participation within these cultures as young women imagine their adult futures.

Recent policy guidance in the UK has increasingly called for a more nuanced understanding of the 'cultural' dimensions of young people's alcohol use. Such approaches at least

acknowledge the dynamics beyond individualised problematic drinking into the realms of social factors beyond age, such as social class, locale and sex-gender norms that powerfully shape these cultures. Discourses of youthful 'fun' remain a key driver for the social aspects of alcohol use and further research into the negotiations of pleasure and new femininities can provide useful tools to explore teen girls' drinking cultures. These might also enable the development of gender-sensitive alcohol education within schools and youth work settings that explore through dialogue, rather than reproduce restrictive and highly normative femininities in 'educating' girls to drink responsibly. Further longitudinal research following girls from their early teens into adulthood has the potential to tease out such narrative and gendered drinking subjectivities.

The 'determined drunkenness' and 'calculated hedonism' of alcohol use described in earlier work here were clear (Measham and Brain, 2006; Szmigin *et al.*, 2008). This did not just involve how much one consumed but the manner, the location, and the content of this hedonism. The girls in this study remind me of other work where schoolgirl tomboys leave tracksuits and trainers behind, before adopting a more 'girly' glamorous femininity (Renold, 2005; Archer *et al.*, 2007). 'Glamming up' and becoming heterosexually active for many of the girls involved a move from binging on lager in the park to becoming transformed into a narrated tale of present and future self-control, sophistication and low-level or selective drinking of cocktails and shots. The older mothers in Killingsworth's work (Killingworth, 2006) also echo such a transformative temporal narrative dimension, highlighting the clearly gendered and generational nature of such drinking stories.

Previous work on girls' friendship and sexual competition remains immensely useful in formulating an analysis of girls drinking and storytelling cultures. Feminist poststructuralist analysis enables an unpicking of the various intersecting discourses that frame young women's subjectivities in performing and negotiating competitive heterosexualised friendship groups, and the meaning making behind the ways alcohol is used within these spaces. As earlier studies in primary school settings have argued, girls' friendship groups operate as spaces where young women navigate intricate social hierarchies (George, 2007; Paechter and Clark, 2010). For the older girls in this study, friendship practices also enabled young women to produce normative gendered performances, and scrutinise and regulate other young women's drinking behaviour.

The collaborative storytelling within girls' friendship groups about alcohol within girls' talk negotiated notions of gendered permissible fun, and framed it within strict temporal and spatial boundaries. Alcohol use and drinking stories, in particular were thus used to negotiate heteronormative teenage femininities rather than necessarily appropriating masculine forms in becoming the 'ladette' bogey woman of the popular press.

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NOTES

1 At the time of writing within England and Wales it is illegal for young people under the age of 18 to purchase alcohol. However, UK laws are complex, and children may consume alcohol within the private home with parental consent from the age of 5. In addition there are complex local bylaws preventing public drunkenness or the consumption of alcohol on the street.
2 The term 'Feds' is a shortened version of FBI, and is used in this context by English young people to describe the police.
3 A brand of stout.
4 Straightedge is a punk based youth subculture that valorises non drinking and non drug taking. For more on the straightedge subculture see Blackman (2004).
5 The term 'gay', following casual homophobic use, was ubiquitous within the field work settings. The phrase had become synonymous with notions of weakness and inferiority.

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